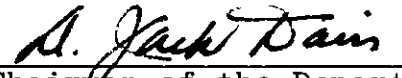
SPONTANEOUS IMAGERY WITHIN

SHAPED FORMATS

APPROVED:

Major Professor

Minor Professor



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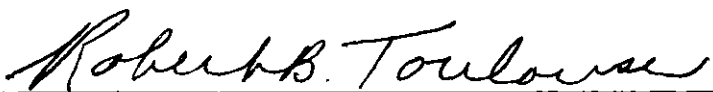

Dean of the Graduate School

SPONTANEOUS IMAGERY WITHIN SHAPED FORMATS

PROBLEM IN LIEU OF THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My work has consisted of spontaneously derived imagery within two-dimensional grids on traditional rectangular formats. The spontaneously derived imagery was developed by pushing around medium (charcoal, graphite, paint, or asphaltum) with my palms and liquid vehicles (turpentine, water, and alcohol) and further development through the use of mixed media to expand its spacial and organic implications. The addition of the grid, as a coordination device, enhanced the spontaneous imagery by breaking up the space in which it was viewed and by creating an illusionary depth which previously did not exist. Recently, this use of the grid had evolved into a prime concern.

Further development of shaped formats, based on expansion of the grid, and its effect on my spontaneously derived imagery was the purpose of this creative project. The primary concerns and problems which were addressed in this project were:

1. Were the shaped formats more or less effective when derived directly from maps and/or photographic panoramas as opposed to deriving them from my own memory and imagination?

2. Was the negative space in which the intaglio prints float, more or less effective than the paintings and drawings which have no bordering negative space?
3. What differences exist in the spontaneous imagery when putting down the initial marks, with my eyes closed, as opposed to when my eyes were open.
4. Did values painted, drawn, or printed over the spontaneous imagery expand the spacial implications and enhance the overall coordination?
5. What problems arose in construction of the shaped formats, how were they solved, and what was the best way to finish the edges for presentation?

Refinement of the spontaneous imagery was appropriately dealt with in each piece according to its particular characteristics.

During the course of this paper, I will be using terms which are ambiguous and open to interpretation. For this reason, I have presented my own personal interpretations. The terms I refer to consistently throughout this paper are: format, spontaneous imagery, and color. Format, in the context of this paper, refers to formal elements such as line, shape, volume, edge, etc. Spontaneous imagery, in my terms, is the organic internal structure of the work which was

initiated spontaneously in that I had no specific imagery or subject matter in mind when the medium was applied. The imagery was applied with gestural movements of my hands and arms and then manipulated further by the natural reaction between turpentine, water, and alcohol. Color terms in this paper are not scientifically specific mainly because the colors I used were not logically decided upon, but were compromises between what my imagination projected into the piece and what I came up with by mixing the colors available to me at the time. In addition, some colors were produced by the spontaneous reaction between turpentine, alcohol, and/or water. For these reasons, I refer to colors in a personal manner which I felt best conveyed my interpretation.

A total of ten paintings, drawings, and intaglio prints were the means by which these problems were visually confronted. Photographic documentation, in the form of color prints, accompanied a journal that was kept during the project. From this project a clearer, both visual and verbal, intent was achieved in my work.

CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

Number 1
"No Title"
mixed media, 9-78
42" x 84"

The format for this painting was derived from my impressions of lunar photographic panoramas found in several sources. The original format idea was altered in order to emphasize spacial ambiguity. Intially, the middle panel was

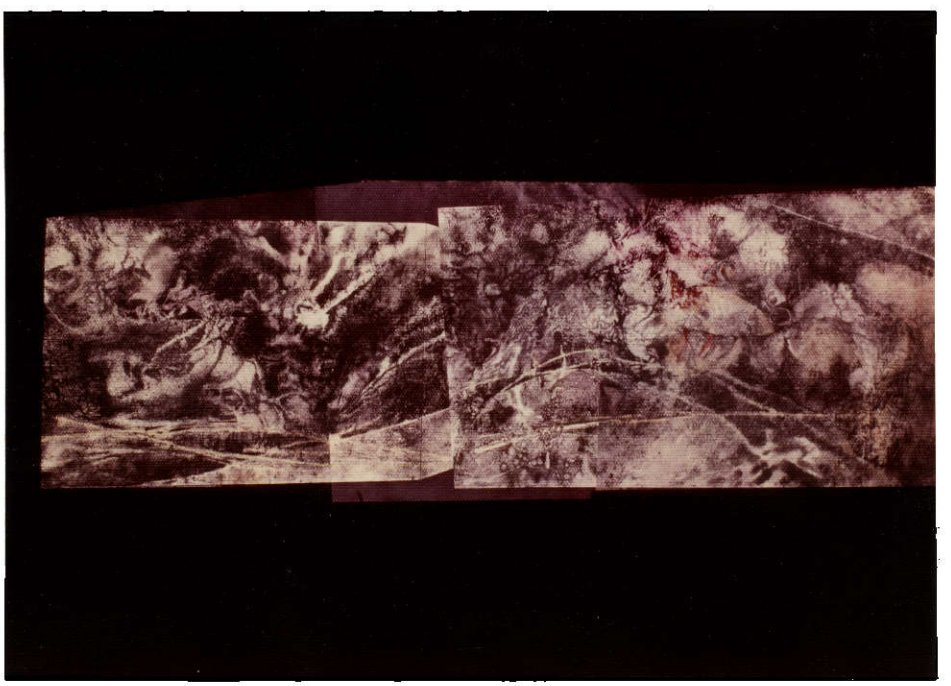

Fig. 1--"No Title"

extended lower than the outside panels and was functional in making visual sense of the overall shape. The result of the secondary alteration appears to be exactly what it was, an afterthought, which rendered the reason for shaped format questionable. This was not totally negative, however, because it gave me the opportunity to consider value shifts applied under the spontaneous imagery.

The tinted gesso underpainting was applied with a three-inch flat brush. Each coat was brushed on perpendicular to the preceding coat, resulting in a canvas or linen-like texture. This fabric-like texture had the tendency to keep the spontaneous imagery rather superficial and not atmospheric as was my intention.

The spontaneous imagery was applied separately on each of the different valued gesso grounds. This resulted in distinct lines of division between the blocks, which tended to negate the spontaneity, as it presented definite spacial planes instead of creating spacial ambiguity. The overall appearance of the spontaneous imagery was a jumble of heavy organic images which contained isolated pockets of interest, but was ineffective as a composition. Oil paint was applied over the charcoal. I found that a small amount of oil paints went a long way in altering the imagery and could very easily be overworked. The introduction of colored pencils helped to integrate the oils with the charcoal.

Number 2
"I'm Flatered...But"
mixed media, 11-78
48" x 52"

The format in this piece was derived as a variation of an earlier intaglio print which was never completely resolved. The original source of departure for the print was my imagination rather than photographic or cartographic sources. It was based on a grid system depicting a cubistic point of view (opposing views shown simultaneously). It was a way of implying three-dimensionality without using perspective. The purpose of this was to lead the viewer into the realization that reality could exist in a two-dimensional form. This

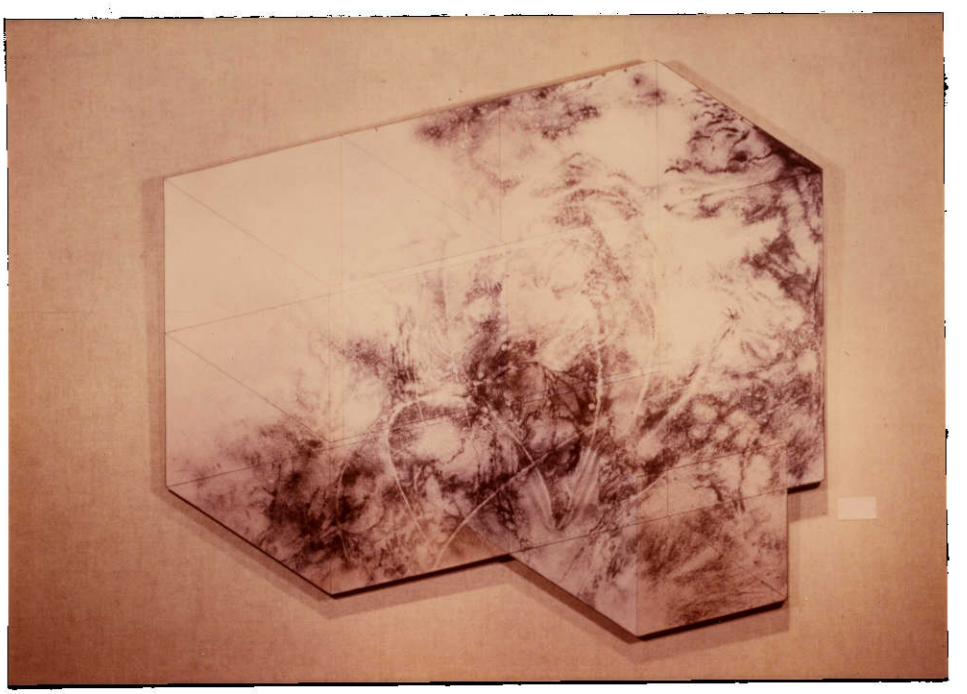

Fig. 2--"I'm Flatered...But"

format represents two-dimensional reality as opposed to three-dimensional illusion.

During construction of the masonite shape, obstacles were encountered due to the size of available materials and poor planning. I chose to work within a forty-eight inch square as a compromise between the size with which I feel comfortable (the larger the better), the four by eight foot size of one-eighth inch untempered masonite, and the approximate proportions of the sketched idea. I drew the design onto the raw masonite, but the extension of one of the cubicles established by the grid system extended beyond the edge of the masonite panel. I therefore found it necessary to extend the size of the panel to compensate for the poor planning.

The shape was cut out with a hand operated jig-saw, and a redwood reinforcement frame was built to include the intended extension. This was adhered to the back of the large masonite panel with water-based contact cement. An additional piece of masonite was cut to the shape of the extension, and it was also adhered to the frame. The small gap left between the masonite pieces was filled with wood putty and sanded smooth. After gessoing, a barely noticeable scar remained, but it completely disappeared after subsequent painting and drawing. The gesso was applied with a house-painter's spraygun which produced a very smooth surface with atmospheric potential.

Initially, two colors (gray and light brown) were used in an attempt to create spacial contradictions (ambiguity); instead, it created spacial definition. Both this layer of gesso and subsequent spontaneous imagery were washed away with turpentine and alcohol. The surface was then re-gessoed with only one value (light gray) and the lines were re-drawn using ruling pen, straight edge, and black acrylic paint instead of lay-out pencil.

The powdered charcoal, turpentine, and alcohol were applied sparingly to allow for growth during the reworking with charcoal, pencils, and paint. The effect was an appearance of natural spontaneity, with the exception of some streaked areas caused by working surfaces which were not level. The imagery worked, but I felt that something remained to be done to strengthen the overall impact of the piece.

Color was introduced in selected areas to strengthen spacial implications and to integrate the spontaneous imagery with the linear image. Blue was chosen for its atmospheric qualities, but it was too strong by itself and an orange color was added in an area slightly larger in size than the blue area. Both of the colors were sprayed transparent in order to let the spontaneous imagery come through. Two bands in the middle third of the piece were masked with tape, leaving them the original light gray. The colors were still too strong, so I repainted the same areas with the same colors,

but in reversed order. Where it was blue, I sprayed orange and vice versa.

This manipulation of color resolved itself nicely and helped greatly in achieving unity between the rigid format and the spontaneously derived imagery. Later, a formica edge was applied which gave the edge a three-dimensional, as well as two-dimensional, function.

Number 3
"Bonnes Bon"
mixed media, 12-78
40" x 36"

The format for this piece was derived from "Bonnes-Projection" (3, p. 65), a cartographic device for mapping an entire hemisphere on a two-dimensional surface. The mathematical formulas given for the construction of the projection were not used; I approximated the shape and proportions visually.

It became necessary to devise a compass that was large enough for a four foot arc and adaptable to hold either graphite holder or ruling pen. This was done by using X-acto circle cutting tool clamps, changing the cutters to paint and pencil holders and replacing the eighteen-inch rod with a four foot brass rod. A small hole was drilled in one clamp to insert the ruling pen as needed.

After cutting the shape from masonite, the problem was to reinforce the curved edges. This was achieved by adhering three by two by one inch redwood blocks, staggered along the

Fig. 3--"Bonnes Bon"

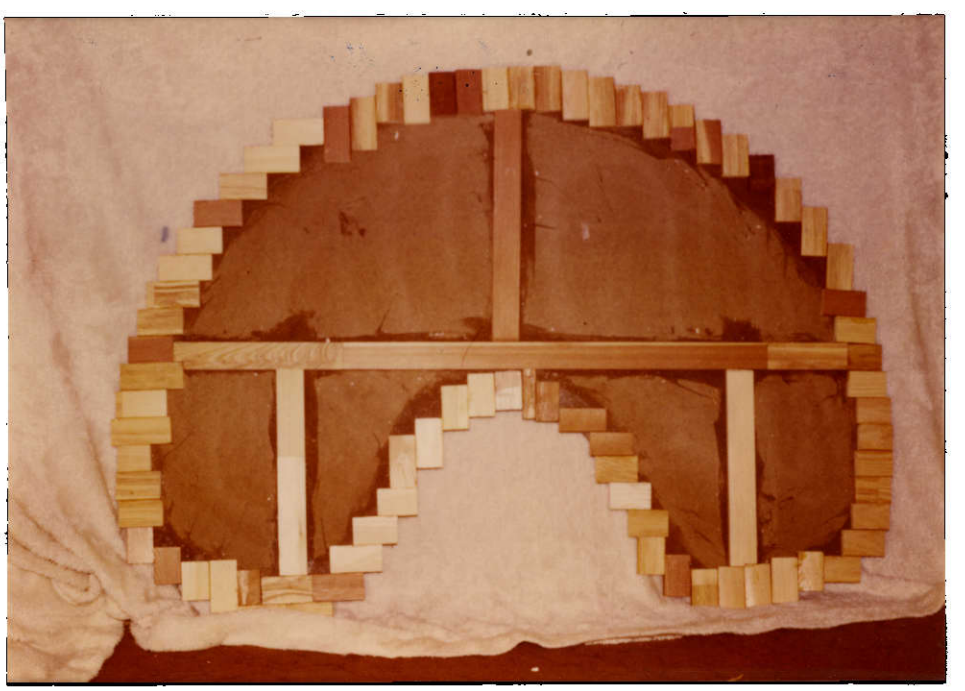

Fig. 4--Construction of masonite panel in "Bonnes Bon."

curves. The ends of the blocks were extended beyond the edge of the masonite panel and were cut off with a jig-saw flush with the masonite edge. Inner braces were constructed and cemented into place for strength and sanded smooth.

The gessoed surface was again sprayed on, and the lines were ruled on with black acrylic. The weight of the brass rod in the large compass caused the rod to sag in the middle, resulting in flaws in the arcs. Touch ups using gesso and a small brush remedied the bothersome flaws. The dotted curves were achieved with ruling pen and a flexible rule. The dot pattern was not uniform, but served its purpose well enough.

The powdered charcoal was again applied sparingly. My initial response to the spontaneous imagery was so strong as to warrant little or no reworking. Some areas were darkened with cartoonists pencil to enhance depth of field.

The spontaneous imagery and the format imagery seemed to work together better in this piece so as not to need additional applications of color to integrate the two entities. The curved lines in the format lent themselves more readily to the spontaneous imagery than did the straight line because of their relationships with the curved and organic shapes of the spontaneous imagery.

Number 4
"No Title"
intaglio print, 1-79
30" x 22"

This two-plate intaglio print was derived from an impression of a map which dated back to the compilings of Claudius Ptolemy in 150 A.D. The format was taken directly, except for the extended section on the left side, from Map Making the Art That Became a Science (1, pp. 56-57). The extended section was added for originality and for its spacial effects.

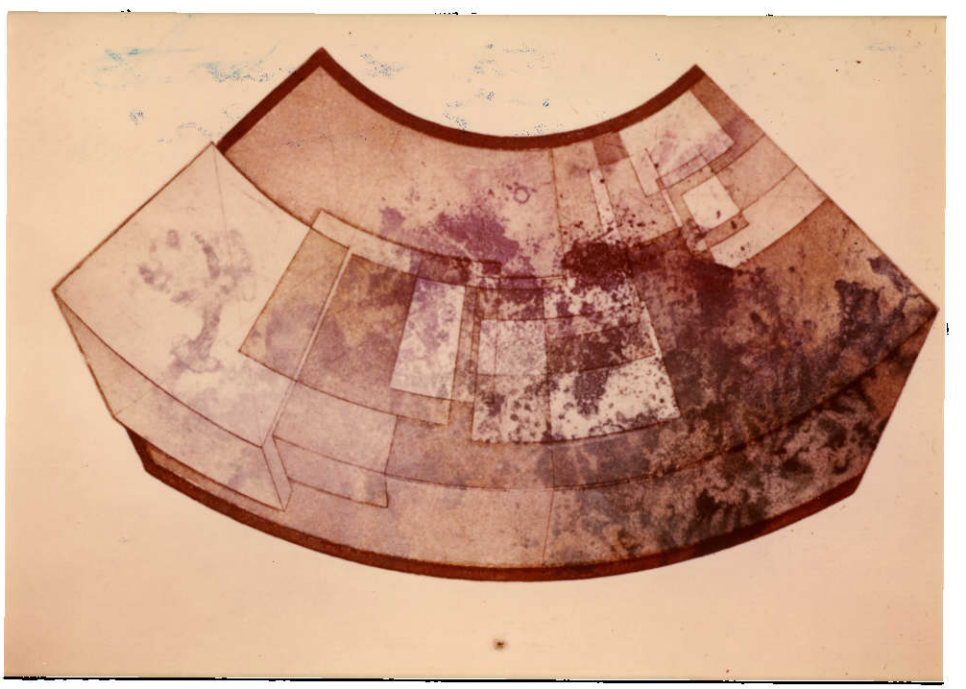

Fig. 5--"No Title"

This is a multi-plate etching with all of the linear design on one plate and all of the spontaneous imagery on

another. While drawing the linear design, I encountered several difficulties. I first decided to scribe the design onto the plate through a thin layer of dried asphaltum. I found that keeping the plate in register with the compass was extremely critical. If moved, it was very difficult to return the plate back into alignment with the compass. Marking the registration was the first thing I should have done. As in the preceding painting, the weight and flexing of the brass rod caused irregularities in the drawn arcs. Once these mistakes occurred, there was nothing to do but try to patch them with asphaltum. But, because the lines were actually scratched into zinc surface, uneven and rough lines were produced. When printed, these lines came out uneven, as if the plate would not release the ink to the paper. I have not yet figured out why this happened, but the dotted lines made with an electric engraver came out very well.

The spontaneous imagery was achieved by brushing and dripping asphaltum onto the plate and manipulating it further with hands, turpentine, alcohol, and water. After allowing the asphaltum to dry, additional texture was added by pressing fabric into the tacky surface and lifting out the partially dried asphaltum. The plate was then etched for two hours, and the imagery was pushed farther by drawing onto the plate with the electric engraver.

Three colors--a light yellow, darker yellow, and a light orange--were wiped onto the spontaneous plate. The oxidation of the plate and thusly the white and yellow pigments turned the colors into varying shades of gray. These oxidized colors were effective when printed with the pheasant brown linear plate.

I would have stopped to print an edition at this point, but I had only two sheets of the proper size paper and no more was available. So, I decided to take the print one step further. The idea was to produce value shifts to balance off the extended section on the left, in the form of color roll-ups. I first tried to achieve this by using acetate stencils; however, the acetate curled, and because of the relatively large plate this method became impossible for less than three people to deal with and even that was inadequate. I did manage to pull a proof that encouraged me to try using cardboard cut-outs instead of direct roll-ups. This method was also inadequate because of the large size of the plate.

Air-brush and stencil techniques were attempted, but this appeared too superficial for my liking.

Because of the lack of paper and time, this print has not yet been resolved. I think, however, that the resolution lies in the actual cutting of the linear plate into two or more sections. I believe that this would not only counterbalance the visually strong extended section, but would also

serve to bring the outside areas into the piece as a functional entity.

Number 5
"Triangulation Piece #1"
2-79
36" x 84"

The format idea for this piece came from triangulation charts in Map Making the Art That Became a Science (1, p. 223). Triangulations are map projections made by connecting given points grouped in threes with straight lines. Composites of different examples and adaptations were made for originality and size of available material.

Upson board was used in this painting-drawing because of its relatively light weight as compared to masonite. I

Fig. 6--"Triangulation Piece #1"

thought that it might be easier to work with, and in some ways it was. Cutting and maneuvering the three by seven foot panel was easier, but problems arose when sanding the edges flush to the redwood frame. The light weight of the Upson caused the edges to fray, unlike the crisp edge obtained with masonite. The edges looked like the edges of an old book. But, subsequent sanding marred the Upson surface, which resulted in uneven absorption of gesso and consequently uneven surface. Repeated coats of sprayed gesso and sanding between coats solved this problem.

The need for a protective as well as functional edge arose when I crumpled a corner while putting the piece away. Strip framing and painted edges seemed inadequate, non-permanent and non-functional as line or protection. Black formica seemed to be the ideal solution. After some failures in learning how to cut and adhere it properly, it worked very well.

I first cut the strips one-eighth inch wider than the depth of the panel and adhered them with contact cement. A router was then used to level the formica flush to the Upson surface. The router put a nice bevel on the formica, but its supposedly stationary roller bearing marred the surface of the Upson. Inside corners were impossible to bevel because of the bulk of the router. This problem was solved with the use of a Dremel moto-tool and grinding bit. The contact cement used to adhere the strips was not strong enough, and

the strips came loose at some of the corners. For this reason, I decided to start over by cutting the strips to the exact depth of the panel and by using liquid nail instead of contact cement. Both of these steps worked well.

The spontaneous imagery in this piece was initially applied while my eyes were closed, but I felt that I was missing the odd-shaped panel with the powdered charcoal. When I opened my eyes, I was surprised to find that I had not missed the panel very much at all. I decided, however, to finish up with eyes open, because I felt more comfortable that way due to the odd shape.

The spontaneous imagery related nicely with the format imagery due to the angled lines of the format and their relationship with angled and curved lines of spontaneous imagery. The shaped format was much more successful when displayed at an angle to floor and ceiling rather than horizontally, as when on the easel.

Number 6
"Tempe Whip"
intaglio print
11" x 15"

The format for this three-plate intaglio print was derived from a personal impression of the preceding painting-drawing, which came from impressions of triangulation maps. This print is basically the two middle sections of the triangulation piece, only much more simplified. It is prismatic in appearance with two sides of the prism being gridded off

off and separated from the basic shape containing the spontaneous imagery. This separation served to spacially divide the grids from the spontaneous imagery, while still relating to it in shape. Separation of format and spontaneous imagery was also enhanced by using different colors for each.

Fig. 7--"Tempe Whip"

Copperplate was chosen over zinc because of its durability and its response to dry-point and electric engravers.

The three plates were drawn onto and cut out with a metal-plate cutter. The two gridded and smaller plates contained drypoint and dotted lines only. The dotted lines were achieved with the electric engraver. Dotted lines were easy to begin with straight edge and engraver, but it was difficult to stop the line at any given point. For this reason, I started the dotted lines (where possible) on interior points and extended them off the edge in one continuous stroke. The resulting line was smooth and consistent, but not quite deep enough to make an apparent printed line. More pressure on the engraver produced deeper and darker lines.

The spontaneous imagery, which was on a separate plate, was achieved by using asphaltum, turpentine, alcohol, and water--with and against each other. The solvents were dripped and sprayed onto the asphaltum which had been brushed and dripped onto the plate.

The first proof of the print was taken with all three plates inked in brown and printed in register with each other. The result was spacially interesting, but compositionally isolated from the surrounding ground or negative space. The next proof was inked in two colors and purposefully mis-registered. The spontaneous plate was inked with Pheasant Brown and the grid plates were inked with turquoise blue. The second proof was more interesting spacially and composi-tionally, as well as color-wise.

An edition of twelve was printed with the intention of exploiting both states further. The spontaneous imagery was less spontaneous in appearance because mist sprayers, instead of more powerful stream-sprayers, were used. Because of the involvement with embossments, color, and format as active elements, I felt that this was a significant print.

Number 7
"Triangulation Piece #2"
graphite, 4-79
44" x 30"

This graphite on tan arches drawing paper differs from all the other pieces in this series in that the format imagery (triangulations) exists within a rectangular environment.

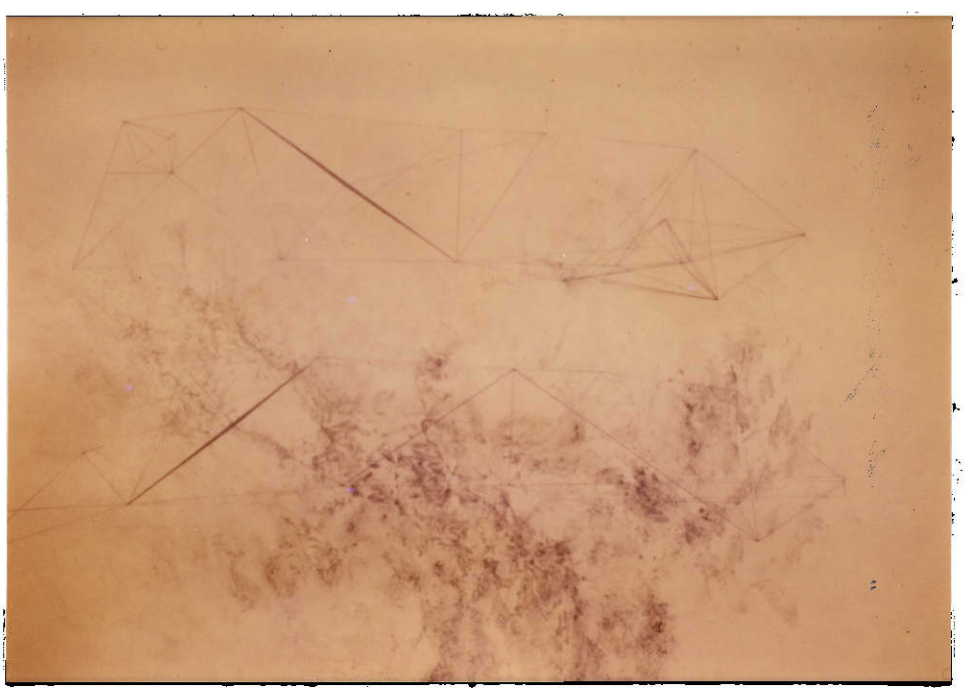

Fig. 8--"Triangulation Piece #2"

Spontaneous imagery exists outside and between the two sets of lines, instead of only within the shapes of the other pieces. These particular triangulations were again taken, visually, from Map Making the Art That Became a Science (1, p. 18).

Graphite is a natural medium for me; and, therefore, this piece was approached with a more disciplined and patient manner. I was able to work on it in short intervals over a longer period of time (three months). In reality, this is not a spontaneous drawing, but has the appearance of being spontaneous because of the long span of time and wide range of attitudes that I went through while drawing.

The only difficulty encountered while working on this piece came when I sprayed water and alcohol on the paper and graphite. Working into the graphite while it was wet was effective, but the paper wrinkled when it dried. Soaking the drawing and drying it under weighted cardboard panels helped, but some wrinkles were still present when framed.

Because this drawing is rectangular, it could be said to not pertain to the intent of this project. I, however, see the piece as a control, and representative of my unwillingness to close the door on rectangular format.

Number 8
"No Title"
mixed media, 3-79
36" x 44"

This curved masonite panel was derived from a map projection in Map Making the Art That Became a Science (1, p. 54). The symmetry and simplicity of the shape lent itself to applying the powdered charcoal and solvents while my eyes were closed. The only difference between this and the other painting-drawings in this project was that some sort of chemical reaction between the turpentine, alcohol, and water produced an orange tint. This reaction seemed to take place where the greatest amount of alcohol was used. I liked this effect and intend to incorporate it to a greater extent in

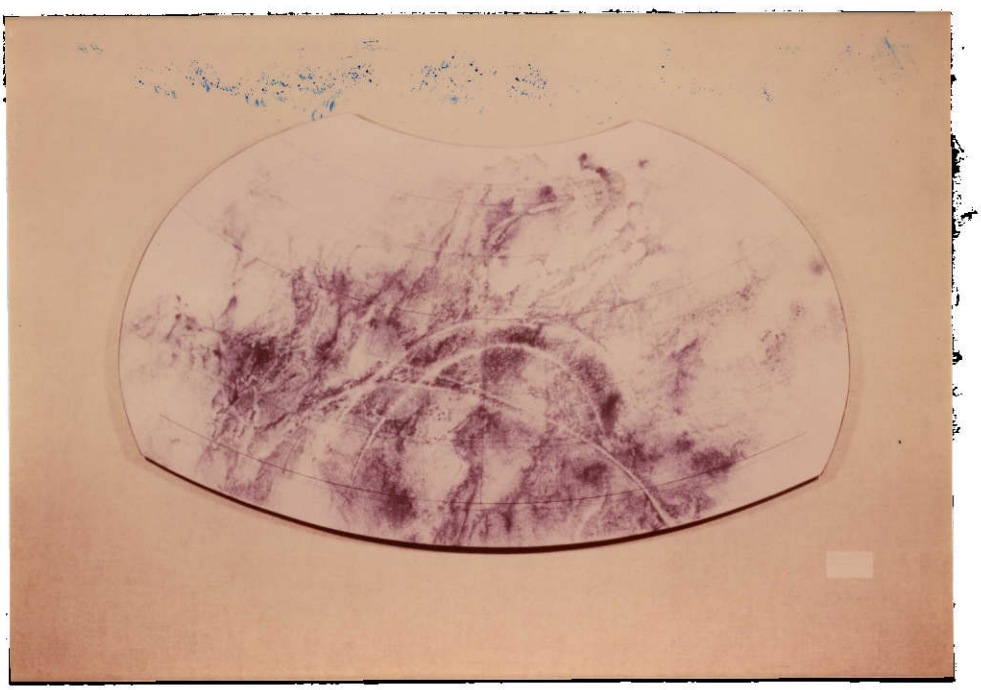

Fig. 9--"No Title"

future works. Perhaps further experimentation such as mixing pigments into the solvents can produce a variety of colors.

The shape was constructed just as in the previous curved painting-drawing except that liquid nail was used in place of contact cement as the adhesive. The result of this change was a much more solid masonite construction. I returned to masonite instead of Upson because of the problems with the edges as discussed earlier. I also found a less expensive supply of masonite panels. The surface provided by gessoed masonite is more durable than the surface of Upson.

The only problem I had while working on this piece was that the large compass I devised earlier was too small for the arc that I wanted. I solved this and the problem of flaws in the arced lines by switching the four foot brass rod with a six foot aluminum rod. The light-weight aluminum did not sag in the middle, resulting in an almost perfect line. The formica edges were applied with no problems, as I had finally become accustomed to working with it in the three previous painting-drawings.

Simplicity of shape and growing confidence of media served to bring format, spontaneous imagery, and materials together in a successful piece.

Number 9
"Global Misrepresentation"
intaglio print, 3-79
13" x 22"

The format for this intaglio print was also taken from illustrations in Map Making the Art That Became a Science (1, p. 54). It was, however, more directly derived than any of the other pieces in that it has fewer simplifications and alterations. It is, in fact, merely a smaller version of the illustrated projection, except that I chose to omit the longitudinal and latitudinal numbers.

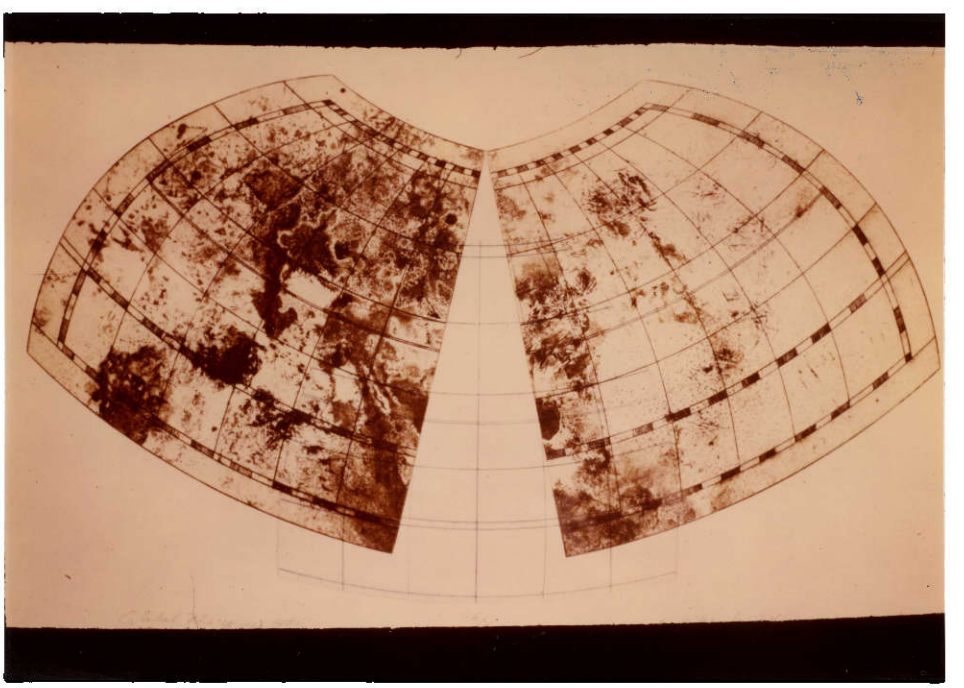

Fig. 10--"Global Misrepresentation"

The shapes were cut from two copperplates with a bandsaw after the image had been scribed through an asphaltum ground and etched in Dutch Mordant for two hours. As in the

preceding painting-drawing, an aluminum rod was used as an armature for the large compass. The more stable rod produced sharp and precise arcs, much improved over the previous curved print (Number 4). The longitudinal lines were drawn in with the aid of a flexible rule.

The spontaneous imagery was derived in much the same manner as in previously discussed etchings. Because of the similarities in color between copper and thinned asphaltum, it was difficult to tell what would or would not etch. I found that by rubbing the asphaltum lightly with my fingers midway through the etching process that areas covered with very thin layers of asphaltum were exposed to the acid bath.

The overall result was an extremely varied range of texture--from very uniform dot patterns to multi-leveled, open bit areas to detailed fabric textures. The wide range of texture was a bit muddled for my liking, so color was introduced with an air-brush and stencils. The color helped somewhat, but appeared to be an afterthought. Its texture was unlike that anywhere else in the print.

A third plate was then added that acted like the gridded plates in piece Number 6. The third plate was positioned between and below the other two plates which had been separated at the bottom to incorporate the negative areas surrounding the printed image with that same image.

This new addition helped greatly to enhance spacial implications; and the separation of the two original plates

made these, as well as conceptual implications, even stronger. A small edition was then pulled.

Number 10
"Fuller's Projection Dislocate"
intaglio print, 4-79
19" x 22"

The format for this five copperplate intaglio print was derived from a global projection designed by Buchminister Fuller, as depicted in Mapping (2, p. 97). It does differ from Fuller's Projection in that it is not mathematically accurate and the longitudinal and latitudinal lines have been omitted. Invisible lines have been indicated with dotted lines. Also the project had been dissected and printed out

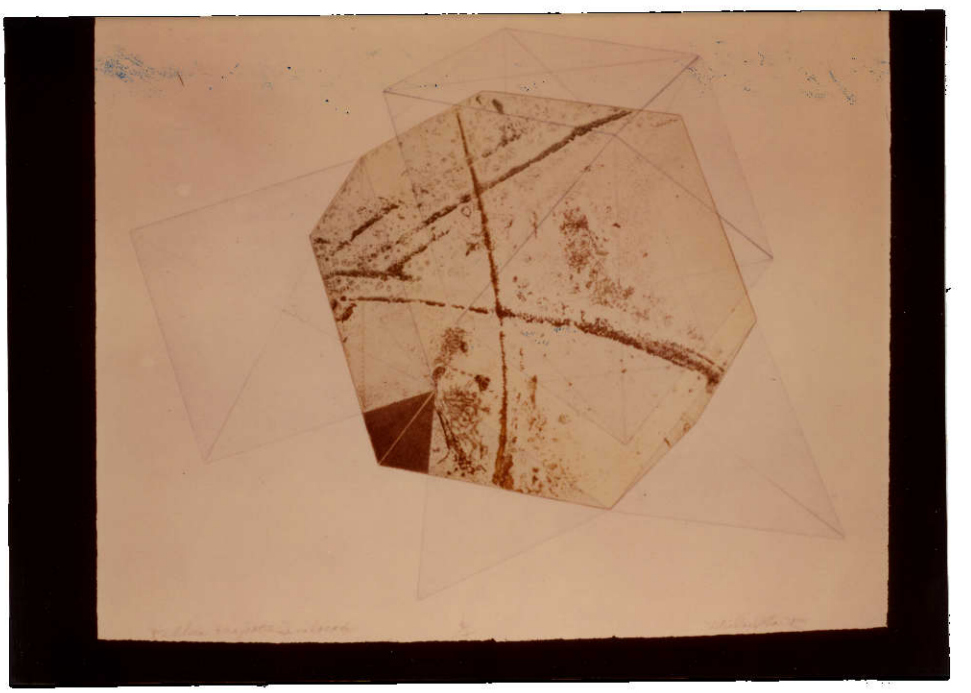

Fig. 11--"Fuller's Projection Dislocate"

of register to enhance spacial implications and to create movement.

The spontaneous imagery was made on a separate plate in much the same manner as in previously discussed prints, except that water was sprayed on in a powerful stream rather than in a fine mist. The powerful bursts of water produced much more dynamic imagery than did the mist.

The format plates were inked in turquoise blue, which printed strong lines and left a subtle plate tone after hand-wiping the plates. The spontaneous plate was inked, initially, in one shade of brown. This gave a clear image, but lacked depth. The plate was then inked in two shades of brown and one shade of green. These colors, combined with a rainbow or banded roll-up (light yellow to pale orange), enhanced depth as well as strengthening overall impact with color.

Because of the use of a more powerful sprayer, as in the painting-drawings of this series, the spontaneous imagery related more to the format imagery to form one of the most complete pieces in the series. Spontaneous imagery, format, and color seemed to finally become one in this final piece.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

This body of work further developed my understanding of the effects of shaped formats, based on the grid combined with my spontaneously derived imagery. I found, that while not necessarily more effective, the format imagery was more abundant and varied when derived from cartographic sources rather than my imagination. I have found that through the use of reference materials combined with my imagination that my limitations have expanded beyond the sole use of either source.

I found that the printed images are more versatile than the painting-drawings, mainly because of the possibilities presented by the use of several plates. Multi-plate prints opened up the shapes to accept the surrounding negative space as a functional entity and also multiplied the possibilities of color usage which strengthened impact and spacial implications. However, I feel that the painting-drawings were more dynamic in size; and, because the prints were displayed in rectangular frames, the paintings were also much more successful at a distance than the prints. Future explorations will result in the combining the separation aspect of the prints with the large size of the panel pieces.

During the course of this project, I experimented with applying the initial stages of the spontaneous imagery while my eyes were open and while they were closed. It is interesting to note that little or no differences were apparent when comparisons were made between the imagery initiated with eyes opened or closed.

Values painted or printed over the spontaneous imagery were found to have profound effects. Spacial implications, color, and overall coordination were all enhanced. Color deepened space and served to coordinate the spontaneous imagery with the format imagery. Overlapping values and colors heightened impact at distances while also creating subtle shifts which were enjoyable at close inspection. The prints seemed to benefit more than the panel pieces, mainly because the panel pieces had the benefit of large size to aid in their impact.

Problems pertaining to the construction of the shapes were confined mainly to the panel pieces. These problems included: reinforcement of curved shapes; protective, as well as functional, edges; and proper adhesive. All of these problems were solved during the course of this project and are discussed in the body of this paper.

The most significant development of this project was the finished art products and the possibilities presented from the use of scientific sources as inspiration for creative manipulation. Before this project, I had been limited to only

my imagination as a source; now I have learned that my imagination is more successfully expressed when combined with outside resources or stimuli.

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